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State of Michigan Legislative Hearing
Family To Family Written Testimony

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Testimony

Before the implementation of Family To Family and the creation of youth boards in Michigan (thru Jim Casey Youth Initiative) there was not a collective youth voice being hurd. For example, there are 2200 youth over the age of 14yr. in foster care in Detroit, most of them African-American. This group is very overrepresented in residential care. When the youth were organized and empowered, they began to speak to DHS executive management and community organizations. They expressed a desire to have greater participation in placement decisions impacting their lives. They clearly stated that "Residential Placement" did not help them and that they felt the best placement for any young person is with a family. They added that they did not want to leave their schools and communities when they were removed from abuse/neglect situations. These concerns led to DHS re-evaluating placement decisions and instituting significant changes. For example, DHS agreed to help the youth form additional youth advisory boards around the state. In 2003 there were 2 youth advisory boards now there are 17 boards. The youth also agreed to help DHS recruit more Foster Care Families for teens and advocated for less shelter and congregate care placements. In Macomb County the use of shelters have decreased while recruitment of Foster Homes have increased. In Detroit, a community collaborative co led by Chief Judge Kelly and DHS management is supporting a reduction in the use of shelters and tracking placement trends daily. DHS has also developed a statewide "Older Youth In Care" workgroup to address the current challenges facing youth in Foster Care. Much of this work has been done partnering with Family To Family, specifically, embracing F2F values, beliefs and the need for child welfare systemic changes that improve outcomes for children.

There still continues to be a need to improve the current outcomes impacting children in Michigan's Welfare System. Family To Family is not a "Silver Bullet" but it is a reform effort that gives our child welfare system a framework to utilize that underscores best practice, community partnerships and decisions that are in the best interest of children, with "Safety" always being the primary concern.